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By *ritual* we mean a primarily religious action, that is, action directed to securing the blessing of some mystical power or powers. The action may be a negative, i.e. an avoidance or taboo, as well as a positive one. Symbols and concepts are employed in rituals but are subordinated to practical ends. Ritual is distinguished from *ceremonial*, which is an elaborate conventional form for the expression of feeling, not confined to religious occasions; any emotional situation, whether religious or secular, may be clothed in ceremony, and a ceremony is not enforced by mystical sanctions, only by conventional ones. In short, a ceremony is an appropriate and elaborate form for the expression of feeling; but a ritual is action believed to be efficacious.[1] Confusion between the two arises in our own society, for what is ritual to some (e.g. a rite of baptism or marriage) is but ceremonial to others. In Nyakyusa society the distinction is fairly clear-cut: *ubunyago*, which is translated here as *a ritual*, means a series of actions directed towards the shades or heroes, and enforced by mystical sanctions, as opposed to action which is merely customary and conventional (*ulwiho*). At a burial, some actions are only *ulwiho*, others are also *ubunyago*. A negative ritual, that which is taboo, is *mwiko*.

Ubunyago is applied as a noun, and in its verbal form, *ukunyagula* (to perform a ritual), to funeral rites, especially that part of such rites in which only immediate relatives participate (*ubunyago bwa bufyele*); to the girls' puberty and marriage ritual (*ubunyago bwa busungu*), to the ritual at birth (*ubunyago bwa bufwe*), especially at twin birth (*ubunyago bwa mapasa*); to the rituals performed on behalf of the country for rain and fertility (*ubunyago bwa kisu*); to the treatment of the young chief and village headmen when authority is handed to them by the older generation (*ubunyago bwa busoka*); and, nowadays, to the sacraments of the Christian Church. *Unyago* is the specialist who knows the right medicines and observances and conducts the ritual. The word is translated as 'officiant' or 'priest'.

By a *symbol* is meant something which typifies or represents something else. Our Nyakyusa informants spoke of *ififwani*—likenesses (the word is also used for photographs)—and in expounding rituals they repeatedly said of an object or action: 'This means (*kokuti*) such and such.' Symbolism is always based on an association, a feeling of likeness between things. The intrinsic quality of an object, or relationship, or event, is expressed in terms of another

[1] cf. Godfrey Wilson, 'Nyakyusa conventions of Burial', *Bantu Studies*, 1939.

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121 object or action which it is felt to resemble. The images men use,
● 811 the things they feel to be alike, are determined in a general way by the form of the society, and Nyakyusa images are in terms of bananas, staple grains, cattle, smithing on a primitive forge, lineage organization and so on. There are cultural idioms, accepted forms of expression, which frequently recur, but the particular associations are not predictable any more than the associations made by a poet in our own society—the priest and the doctor are indeed in one aspect poets.

771 The essence of Nyakyusa ritual is that things which are felt to
813 be alike are taken as causally connected. Both positive actions and
843 avoidances or taboos are based on the assumption that like objects or actions react on one another. This was clearly recognized by an informant who remarked: 'avoidances come from resemblances.' The basis is invariably the *feeling* of likeness, but mixed up with this there is often exact observation, as in the following taboo. The husband of a pregnant woman may not hunt big game because, it is said, they will be unusually fierce and attack him particularly. The association made is between a pregnant woman who is irritable, 'fierce' (*nkali*), and the game which is fierce. The husband is identified with his wife, 'and', the Nyakyusa say, 'lion *always* attack a cow in calf'. Sometimes like things are felt to be antagonistic, as 'seed in the belly' and seed in the ground, and sometimes sympathetic. Sometimes like is thought to produce like—a pregnant woman is forbidden to sit close to someone lest she bears twins—and sometimes men mime a misfortune as a prophylactic against it.

789 The rituals are magical in the sense that efficacy is held to lie in
184 the particular material form,[1] but they vary in detail with the
771 cultural group, just as the language does.[2] The rituals of the Lakeshore plain in Tanganyika (MuNgonde) and of Selya are almost identical, but those of the Kukwe, the Lugulu, the Saku, the Ndali, the Penja, and the people of Ngonde in Nyasaland are all somewhat different. Differences in ritual are directly connected by the people themselves with differences in lineage, and the principle is maintained that every individual follows the ritual of his or her father's lineage, though a married woman will follow that of her

[1] For a discussion of this characteristic of magic cf. G. & M. Wilson, *The Analysis of Social Change* (1945), pp. 72–3; 88–95.

[2] An account of the various cultural groups included under Nyakyusa, and of related peoples, is given in *Good Company*. pp. 1–5.

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781 man; but all kinsmen and affines fear contagion, and the family
764 fear spiritual afflictions as well.

[811] These fears are dealt with in two ways: fear is an immediate state of feeling which the Nyakyusa, on this occasion, express and make tolerable in the wailing, the dancing, and so on; but their terror is also rationalized[1] as a fear of certain specific events proceeding from religious causes, and thus is pacified by various ritual actions which are believed effectively to prevent those happenings. The killing of cows, the washing with magical plants, the subsequent ritual of protection—all these are designed to check the occurrence of fearful events.

781 But still the fear, as an actual state of feeling at the time of a
764 death, has to be expressed in some tolerable form. Its expression
721 in the wailing associated with grief is already clear; and it is also
535 proved that the war-dance is, for the men most affected, both an expression and an alleviation of their terrified grief: 'There is war in our hearts—a passion of fear and grief exasperates us—it is made tolerable in the dance.'

781 It is the attitude of the chief mourners that is the clue to the
764 whole ritual; and the contrast between terrified wailing and lively dancing, which seems very strange at first to a European observer, is explained by it. The fear and sorrow of death are only emotionally tolerable if their expression is followed by, or combined with, an assertion of life. This is certainly true of the Nyakyusa, and possibly it is universally true. Having no confident expectation of happiness in a future life, these pagan Africans turn at burial to a realization of present life in its most intense quality, to the war-dance, to sexual display, to lively talk, and to the eating of great quantities of meat.

And to this emotional reaction of the chief mourners the sympathetic vivacity of other people is essential. The Nyakyusa were astonished to hear of the sobriety of an English funeral: 'We talk and dance to comfort the relatives. If we others sat sad and glum, then the grief of the relatives would far exceed ours. If we just sorrowed what depths of grief would they not reach? And so we sit and talk and laugh and dance until the relatives laugh too.' And they were even more surprised at the suggestion that anyone might wish for privacy. 'We are quite different: we keep people company, when a relative has died, to cheer them. I am com-

[1] The word 'rationalize' properly implies neither truth nor falsehood of thought, but simply the fact of its existence.

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354 new home, and her mother-in-law provides her with fire and a pot.

783 After the bride has had full intercourse with her husband she cannot return home, or see her own parents, until she has taken them the ritual *ilibalaga*. After sexual intercourse she wipes her husband's genitals with her hands, then wipes them on a fowl and some millet: these together form the *ilibalaga*. In the morning she goes off without washing—'with the filth of intercourse on her'—to her parents' house, taking the fowl and millet with her. The fowl is killed on a path and cooked with *ikipiki* medicine and, if the bride is the eldest daughter of one of the father's first two wives, her father and mother eat it together. Her mother eats alone if she is a younger daughter, or the mother is a junior wife. If the father is a chief the husband may kill a young bull and beef is sent in place of the hen.

834 After eating the *ilibalaga* her parents resume intercourse[1] which has been taboo from the time the girl first menstruated. If no hen is brought because the husband is poor, the parents still resume sexual intercourse, but the bride, when she visits her home, must not take water from her mother's pot. Someone else draws for her and she drinks it outside from a separate calabash. If she drinks
[753] inside, or if her mother uses the calabash she has used, it is believed that her mother will get diarrhœa. She also avoids her father's bed and stool.

606 With the ritual of marriage must be included the negative ritual of avoidance between a woman and her husband's father and between those identified with him or her. The taboo applies from the time of betrothal or, if the girl has been betrothed as an infant, from well before she reaches puberty, and forbids father-in-law and daughter-in-law ever to look at one another or meet face to face on the pathway, or enter the same house, much less speak together. As we have seen, a similar taboo applies between the bride and her own father during her seclusion, but is relaxed when he
[184] has given her a gift. Between a woman and her father-in-law, however, it is never relaxed, except among the more sophisticated
773 Christians. A myth of origin tells of a case of incest between father-
606 in-law and daughter-in-law which led to the establishment of the
● 811

[1] Kasitile maintained that if the mother has not reached the menopause the parents do not lie together until the daughter's pregnancy is apparent. 'For the mother to conceive before the daughter is forbidden, but old women are fruits sucked dry.' Mwakionde denied any danger in mother conceiving before daughter.

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taboo, and the practical difficulties of observing the taboo if fathers and sons live in the same village is cited as a reason for the age-village organization.[1]

The marriage ritual may be said to finish with the eating of the *ilibalaga*, but avoidance of father-in-law and daughter-in-law continues until death and no clear line can be drawn between the marriage ritual proper and the rituals of pregnancy and birth which follow.

It is plain from the events described that the *ubunyago bwa-busungu* is a marriage as well as a puberty ritual and that the husband and his family play an essential part in it, but if a girl is not betrothed before puberty a curtailed ritual is still performed for her when she grows up. She drinks the *undumila* medicine, she washes with a brother, and her mothers put her formally into the hut of seclusion. They cook for the various feasts, and they tell her brothers to call their friends to help dance the stamping dance. The litter is cleared by her mothers in due course, and she is shaved and instructed. When she is eventually married, only the rites of slaughtering the bull of virginity, taking her to her husband, and returning with the *ilibalaga* are performed. She does not wash with him ritually.

(*b*) *The overt purpose and symbolism*

The avowed purpose of the *ubusungu* ritual is to protect the physical and mental health of the girl and to ensure her fertility. 'If the ritual is not performed the girl will fall ill, go mad, or not bear children.' Numerous informants were agreed on this point. Angombwike expanded it, saying: 'It is said that if they do not perform the ritual of *ubusungu* the bride will go mad. When she is sick of the madness they perform the ritual. If the doctor says: "Those below are angry," then the father of the girl takes water and prays in the banana grove saying: "My father and my grandfather, let the child recover from her sickness." Sometimes the doctor says: "The so-and-so's (naming a village) have cursed her"; then the father seeks a bull and they eat it. It is the curse which comes from the mouths of people when many whisper saying: "Why have they not performed the ritual? Why have they not performed it?" It comes from their evil breath.' Neglect of the puberty ritual is therefore thought both to anger the shades and to shock the neighbours, who expect to feast on this occasion.

[1] cf. Monica Wilson, *Good Company*, pp. 82–6.

3: Mackenzie M-5 (ca. 1925) 1925
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and kill many people. The chief, Mwenemusuku, protected his land in the manner described in the chapter on "The Powers of Evil," and none of his people were killed, though the total killed by a lion in that year in neighbouring districts was very large. A letter in my possession puts the number at forty, while others say fifty. Where the chief protected his land in the traditional way, the people were safe; where this was not done, the toll of human lives was great.

In 1922 the same woman predicted that, for the sins of the people, a spotted hyena would kill many. Again the chief protected his land, and again no one was killed; while in a neighbouring and unprotected land, the death-roll was considerable. In the same year leopards were predicted in the Nserya district. The chief was urged to sacrifice an ox, but refused. Six people were killed, and a number of mauled men and women were treated by Dr. Brown at the Mission at Itete.

To the Konde, as I have already said, there is no difficulty in connecting prediction and fulfilment. The inspiration of the foretellers is not doubted; the animals came as foretold; why should reasonable men refuse to acknowledge a relation between the two events? At any rate it may be presumed that the native will go on seeing a connection, while the white man will fall back upon the ever-ready doctrine of coincidence, and refuse upon any terms to acknowledge any other relation.

There is, however, spirit possession of another kind,

3: Mackenzie M-5 (ca. 1925) 1925
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CHAPTER XVIII

Divination & the Lot

THE fact of death is not regarded by the tribes of Central Africa as forming a barrier between the living and the dead. The two form one community, and the means of communication between them are naturally therefore well developed. Living and dead are mutually dependent, and a certain amount of goodwill must necessarily exist between them. What the dead cannot do for themselves, the living must do for them; and what the living must know, but do not, the dead can tell them if properly interrogated. It is upon this fact that divination depends, as do omens also to some extent. The use of charms and amulets, however, depends upon the other, and perhaps closely related fact, that Nature is not a fixed system of laws pursuing its way regardless of human needs, but is pliable, responsive, and will advise, protect, injure, according to the means used by those who possess the power.

The idea that the whole system of consultation of the spirits, of the interpretation of omens, and of the use of charms and amulets, is based upon conscious deception—a few clever men in each community

3: Mackenzie M-5 (ca. 1925) 1925
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787 taking advantage of the credulity of the masses—can be entertained only by those who have acquired no •811 insight into the native mind and its working. It is impossible to maintain that a system, as wide as a continent, and as persistent as the centuries, should be the outcome of an age-long conspiracy to cheat. The human mind does not work in that way. The system is involved in the world-view; it is woven into the mind-texture of the people, and the honesty of the " practitioners " is, in many cases, as indubitable as the faith of the people.

791 The prayer for rain, for instance, is offered with a simple sincerity, as honest as any petition ever offered in a Christian church. I am not asserting that the prayer brings the rain; nor yet that it does not. Nor do I suppose that the diviner is in touch with fact, when he uses what he considers to be means of getting into communication with the spirits. I am arguing only for the honesty, in a great majority of cases, of the men who do these things. They are men with a conviction.

The diviner usually hands on his knowledge and his office to one of his own family; but an outsider may learn his secrets by paying an ox or a cow. I am not aware that there is any serious attempt to guard the secrets of the profession, though the various drugs used are not made known except to those who are willing to pay the fee. The only form of initiation is [304] the incising of medicines into the arms or wrists of the initiate, and this incision may be renewed should occasion require it.